

ESTUARIES & COASTAL WETLANDS OF LAKE SUPERIOR

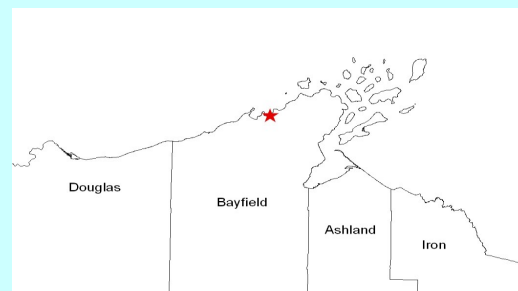
Siskiwit River

Approximate Size: 20 acres*

Ownership: Private

Year Last Surveyed by WDNR/NHI: 2012

GLCWC Classification: Open Drowned River Mouth



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Site Description

The Siskiwit River empties into the southeast corner of Siskiwit Bay just north of Cornucopia. The site is surrounded by a significant amount of development, particularly from the Siskiwit Bay Marina and an associated jetty. Despite this extensive development the lower stretch of the Siskiwit River is designated as a Class II trout water and supports spawning rainbow and brown trout as well as northern pike, bullheads, suckers, shiners, and Chinook and coho salmon. The natural communities at this site, namely Alder Thicket and Great Lakes Dune, are part of an extensive coastal wetland complex that spans much of Siskiwit Bay eventually connecting with Lost Creek Bog State Natural Area, a high quality coastal wetland located south and west of the Siskiwit River mouth.

Along the shore of Lake Superior west of the Siskiwit Bay Marina lies a low-diversity Great Lakes Dune dominated by dune grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) and Canada wild-rye (*Elymus canadensis*). A 15-acre Alder Thicket complex occurs east and southwest of this area and is the largest natural community at this site. Dominant species include speckled alder (*Alnus incana*), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), and sedges (*Carex* spp.) An unnamed feeder stream runs through the Alder Thicket complex and other shallow pools of standing water are found throughout the area as well, harboring a moderate diversity of emergent and submergent aquatic flora, including one rare plant. Patches of fair-quality sedge meadow are found in the more open areas of this complex, although reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) is also present. Further upstream above the steep north-facing bedrock cliffs near Siskiwit Falls is a small area of Boreal Forest dominated by balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), and white pine (*Pinus strobus*). The ground layer is quite depauperate, comprised mostly of Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*) along with some ferns. The presence of tree stumps and a fallow agricultural field nearby hint that the area was previously logged and possibly grazed.

*Area includes lower river and associated wetlands approximately 0.3 miles upstream.

Threats

Although recent sediment sampling in the harbor did not indicate unusually high contaminant levels, water quality and wetland function are known to be adversely affected by open lands (e.g., developed land, agriculture, young forest) and positively affected by older forests and conifers. Most of the wetlands surrounding the river mouth have been filled and paved over and the banks are slumping into the river in places, increasing the sediment inputs into the river. Dune vegetation and stability are threatened by trampling and other destructive recreational uses. Also, exotic invasive species such as reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea biebersteinii*), Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), hawkweed (*Hieracium* sp.), common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), and common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), all occur at this site and threatened to replace native vegetation.

Additional Comments

The Lake Superior Binational Program has identified Siskiwit River as an important site for fish spawning and nursery grounds. This site may also be important for shorebirds, which use sandy beaches in Siskiwit Bay.

Abbreviations and Helpful References

GLCWC - Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Classification. glc.org/wetlands/pdf/wetlands-class_rev1.pdf

WDNR Coastal Wetlands webpages - <http://dnr.wi.gov>, Keyword: "coastal wetlands"

WDNR/NHI - Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Inventory Program. <http://dnr.wi.gov>, Keyword: "natural heritage"

Lake Superior Binational Program - <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakesuperior>

"Managing Woodlands on Lake Superior's Red Clay Plain" - WDNR publication #PUB-FR-385 2007. <http://dnr.wi.gov>, Keyword: "bmp landowner guides"



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Alder Thicket (left) and Boreal Forest (right) can both be found near the lower stretch of the Siskiwit River.

Suggested Citation

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WISCONSIN COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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